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A

LETTER

TO THE

VEN. ARCHDEACONS HALE AND SINCLAIR,

BEING THE

BISHOP OF LONDON'S REPLY

TO AN ADDRESS

FROM A LARGE BODY OF HIS CLERGY

ON THE SUBJECT OF

SUBSCRIPTION TO FORMULARIES.

LONDON:

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.

1863.

W W Hall

FULHAM PALACE,

11th July, 1863.

MY DEAR ARCHDEACONS,

I HAVE with great care perused the important Address on the subject of Subscription which, together with a letter from yourselves dated the 30th ult., you presented to me on the 9th of this month. I have also carefully considered that printed* explanation which you were kind enough to forward to me this morning, and which also reached me at the same time from another quarter; without which explanation, indeed, I should have found it difficult to understand the full scope and real intention of the Address.

In this document of explanation, sent round by the promoters of the Address to all the Clergy of the Diocese, with the request that they would append their names, it is stated, as I interpret the words:—

1st. That those who sign the Address are not to be understood as being unprepared to accept any future revision of the existing clerical subscriptions, if undertaken by the Church itself.

2d. That what is protested against in the first paragraph of the address is, some supposed intention

* The Letter of the Archdeacons, the Address and Explanation, are printed at the end.

of abolishing all subscriptions to the Church's formularies by an Act of Parliament.

3d. That those who sign the Address record their conviction that the Church must have some doctrinal standards.

It is a great satisfaction to me to feel that, not only can I, as might be expected, cordially assent to the principles thus enunciated, but that I scarcely think there can be any amongst us who, when they fully consider the subject, will not find themselves to be in these points of the same opinion with the subscribers to the Address.

1. There are some, perhaps, who believe that all the existing clerical subscriptions ought to be maintained under all circumstances and at all hazards. I agree, however, with those who have prepared the Address, that it is better to leave their maintenance or alteration an open question.

2. I have never heard that it has been asserted in the House of Lords, or in Convocation, that all subscriptions to formularies ought to be abolished by Act of Parliament, neither can I believe that such a proposal, even if incautiously made at first by any one, will be persisted in when the question has been fully considered in all its bearings. So far as I am able to understand what has been of late advanced, I must take for granted that the proposal to abolish Subscriptions by Act of Parliament, is confined to those of our Subscriptions which Parliament has imposed.

I believe that all who fully consider this matter, must soon come to hold, if they do not already hold, with those who have signed this Address, that, under our existing constitution, wherever the Church, and not the State, has imposed Subscription, the Church is the proper authority to alter any rules as to this matter which it has itself made. Thus, for example, if any propose to abrogate the three Articles of the 36th Canon, they must, I presume, allow that this would naturally be effected by rescinding or altering the Canon in a legitimate ecclesiastical way through the joint authority of Convocation and the Crown. To me, in reference to such a subject-matter as we are now considering, this seems as plain a principle of legislation under our present circumstances as that other axiom, that where the State, and not the Church, has imposed the obligation—as *e.g.* in the case of the assent and consent to the Prayer-book required by the Act of Uniformity—the State, that is, an Act of Parliament, can alone remove the obligations which Parliament has imposed.

3. I can scarcely believe there is any churchman who does not think that the Church must have some doctrinal standards.

As concerns therefore these three points, it is satisfactory to me to think that not only that large body of Clergy in the Diocese, who have signed this Address as explained by the document I have cited, but also that still larger body whose signatures, from whatever reason, are absent, may, so far as I know, be

considered in the main as of one mind on this subject.

It is, I think, only when we come to the explanation of the third paragraph in the Address that opinions diverge. The subscribers to the Address declare, as I understand them, that in their opinion it is hopeless to expect that in these difficult times any improvement can be made in our present declarations. Here the subscribers are no doubt aware that many of their brethren take a different view. For myself personally, I have stated in the House of Lords that on one point at least I agree with those who are more hopeful. I fully believe that it would be a great improvement to abolish by Act of Parliament the clause in King Charles the Second's Act of Uniformity, which was originally forced on the country soon after the Restoration by the dominant intolerant party, with the distinct view, as is believed, of excluding from the Church all who hold, what I may call, the ordinary Evangelical opinions as to the Prayer-Book.

I rejoice indeed to think, with those who have written the last paragraph of this Address, that circumstances have so much changed since King Charles the Second's time, that the Clergy of what are called Evangelical sentiments may now, with perfect honesty, accept the declaration in question in the modified sense which the traditions of the Church have assigned to it; but I am still deliberately of opinion that we should be better without it. I scarcely know whether, if it were removed, any of those who pride themselves on

being the representatives of the old Puritans, and at present keep aloof from us, might be expected to join our communion; but of this I feel certain, that a large body of our own most devoted Clergy would be in a more satisfactory position without this parliamentary declaration. My own opinion, now often repeated, is, that it is very undesirable to retain declarations which have an unpleasant appearance of meaning more than they are now authoritatively explained to imply. Conscientious men, in not a few instances, are known to have been subjected by such declarations to much unnecessary pain, and at times scandal follows. I have pointed out in the House of Lords that this particular declaration of King Charles the Second's Act of Uniformity can scarcely be needed, since it is imposed on only a limited number of the Clergy.

You will see from this why I cannot assent to the statement which in the explanation is put forth as implied in the third paragraph of the Address. You will see also, from what I have now said, how far I can agree with the general tone of this Address, and how far I differ from it.

You may remember, that in my Charge of December last I expressed my conviction that the time had come when this subject of subscription to our formularies must be carefully examined by the Church. The debates in Parliament during the last few months have, I think, shown that I was not mistaken in the opinion I had formed as to the aspect of the times.

Many pamphlets have been written on Subscription and the Act of Uniformity since December—several addressed to myself. The subject, as I anticipated, is receiving full consideration, and you are aware that the Lower House of Convocation of the Province of Canterbury has appointed a Committee to go fully into the whole matter. The uneasiness felt and expressed on the subject of the Burial Service points in the same direction. No one can read the recorded recent debate in the House of Lords without seeing how deep is the feeling of dissatisfaction with the present state of the law in reference to that Service.

Now I gather that those who have addressed me are more or less afraid of the discussions which have thus arisen. Such a fear is, I grant, by no means unnatural in the face of events which have disturbed the Church during the last three years; but I am not myself alarmed. If dangers threaten us, I should wish the Clergy to consider whether our Church will not best be strengthened to meet them by carefully and reverently examining the system we love; by making, after due deliberation and by competent authority, any changes in it which are proved to be required, and then maintaining what is not changed, no longer in mere dread of innovation, but on grounds of good argument as being right in itself. We ought to reflect whether the Church has not been exposed in past days to most serious peril through that cowardly fear lest it may suffer from a careful examination of any supposed defects in its system,

which has at times led certain portions of the clergy to look with distrust on their brethren who loved Christ and our own Church as earnestly as any of ourselves, merely because they felt themselves called to record their desire of altering certain parts of the Church's system which they believed to be stumbling-blocks in the way of its more perfect usefulness.

I am reminded, my dear Archdeacons, by words which you have used in your letter to me, that it is our duty to "banish and drive away all erroneous and strange doctrines contrary to God's word." It cannot be doubted that all of us, Bishops and Clergy, have much cause in these days to ponder the full meaning of these words in our Ordination vow. The hearts of all good men in England have of late been made very anxious lest the authority of Christ's truth should be shaken amongst our people. Of course, in such a body as the Clergy of our great National Church, there must be diversity of opinion as to the best way in which attractive errors are to be met, and the Church of Christ with the truth it guards effectively defended. Some will fall back in their alarm on old expedients of a rigid subscription: some will be eager to invoke the law, that error may be restrained by penalties: others, in a generous and unsuspecting reliance on the force of truth, will see the only way out of all difficulties through a free and fair discussion, and an increase of theological learning: some will trust to the effect of clear and well-considered statements of the

positive teaching of the Church: others will place their chief hope in an outpouring of the Spirit of God, whereby a more real and deep Christianity, taking possession of men's hearts and moulding their principles, may enable them to resist dangerous error, as a healthy body throws off infection. I will not enter here on the thoughts which these various views suggest. I will only say that as our Church has come out of dangerous crises in its past history unscathed and strengthened, so I have full confidence that by God's blessing we are safe now. Are the times dangerous? Every age has had its peculiar trial. I am far from thinking that our state is worse than that of our fathers. Indeed we ought thankfully to acknowledge that we have much better ground for confidence than they. Are there differences of opinion amongst us as to what is best for the Church? My experience now for seven years of the Clergy of this Diocese convinces me, that, amidst their natural differences of opinion, there never was a time when they were more heartily and zealously agreed to do their Master's work, or more reverentially alive to the promised blessings of His aid.

In the letter which accompanies the Address of the Clergy, you have also alluded to the further subject of University Subscriptions, and have called on me to give my aid for "the preservation of those barriers by which our forefathers endeavoured to exclude from the Schools of the Universities . . . all persons of whose cordial adherence to the doctrine of the Church there

was any reason to doubt." I am not sufficiently acquainted with the regulations of the University of Cambridge to know exactly what subscriptions are now retained there. With regard to the University of Oxford, this subject has been recently so fully discussed in the House of Lords, and in that discussion I stated my own opinion so explicitly, that it can scarcely be necessary for me to enter on it again here. I would only remind you that, with the exception of the promise of conformity which the Act of Parliament requires of Professors, Fellows, &c., and the test which may at any time be required by the Vice-Chancellor of persons suspected of heresy, all subscriptions of this kind have now for several years been abolished, except those required at the Master of Arts and other higher degrees: that while, so far as I could judge, there was in the recent debate a general agreement in the House of Lords as to the propriety of retaining the Government of the University in the hands of members of the Church of England, many thought (and I was amongst the number) that the present form of subscription is unsuitable. There was, however, a general agreement also, that it is best to leave the University itself to deal with this important subject.

I have thought it right, my dear Archdeacons, to explain my sentiments thus freely, for I am sure this is what the Clergy of the Diocese would desire; and I would now beg you to assure those who have signed the Address presented to me, that I consider it very

important that I should have thus been made acquainted with their views.

The questions connected with the weighty subject which they have brought before me will receive their solution in one way or another, when the public opinion of the Church and nation has been sufficiently informed and matured. The Address you have sent to me will no doubt contribute in its degree to assist in the formation of a sound public opinion. Meanwhile I feel confident that those who have addressed me, and those who differ from them, will respect each other's conscientious convictions, and I trust that they will all be enabled, by the grace of God, to labour together harmoniously in the service of the Church they love, and of its Divine Lord.

Believe me to be,

My dear ARCHDEACONS,

Yours very faithfully,

A. C. LONDON.

THE VEN. ARCHDEACONS HALE AND SINCLAIR.

LETTER OF THE ARCHDEACONS.

Unto the RIGHT HONOURABLE *and* RIGHT REVEREND
ARCHIBALD CAMPBELL, LORD BISHOP OF LONDON.

LONDON, 30th June, 1863.

WE, the Archdeacons of London and Middlesex, have been requested to present to your Lordship the accompanying Address, which has received the signatures of a large number of Prebendaries of the Cathedral Church of the Diocese, and of Incumbents and Curates in our respective Archdeaconries.

The Address did not originate with ourselves, but with the Clergy. We are bound, however, to declare our full concurrence in its object, and to express the hope that your Lordship will give your powerful aid for the preservation of those barriers of Subscription by which our forefathers endeavoured to exclude from the schools of the Universities, and from the ministry of the Church, all persons of whose cordial adherence to the doctrine of the Church there was any reason to doubt.

We believe that this essential object has hitherto, to a large extent, been attained, and that the Church has been thus preserved from the influx of heretical, heterodox, and schismatical teachers, who, if the door were opened in the manner proposed, would be admitted to minister in it.

We feel confident that we need not refer to the numbers, the character, or the position of those by whom the Address has been signed, in order to secure for it your Lordship's most attentive and anxious consideration; and we pray

that the wisdom which is from above may guide and strengthen you, as well in the fulfilment of all other duties pertaining to your high and holy office, as in that which you are now called upon to undertake, “of banishing and “driving away all erroneous and strange doctrine contrary “to God’s Word, and of privately and openly calling upon “and encouraging others to do the same.”

We have the honour to be,

With much respect,

Your most faithful and obedient Servants,

W. H. HALE,

ARCHDEACON OF LONDON.

JOHN SINCLAIR,

ARCHDEACON OF MIDDLESEX.

THE ADDRESS OF THE CLERGY.

To the RIGHT HONOURABLE *and* RIGHT REVEREND *the* LORD
BISHOP OF LONDON.

We, the undersigned Clergy of the Diocese of London, desire very respectfully to represent to your Lordship—

That we view with much apprehension suggestions, which have recently been made by those whose position gives weight to their opinion, that the existing Subscriptions made by the Clergy at their Ordination, and on other occasions, should be removed by the Legislature.

That fidelity to her Divine Head being the first duty of the Church, it is due to her Lay Members that they should be assured that her Ministers retain the deposit of the Faith, and that they minister the Word and Sacra-

ments according to Christ's Ordinance, and that in our judgment this assurance would be impossible without some doctrinal safeguards and tests of personal faith.

That to attain these objects no securities, as the testimony of history shows, can be depended upon without Clerical Subscription; and though it may be conceded that the existing tests have not been able to keep out all error even from teachers in our own communion, yet we feel assured that in these days they are not likely to be replaced by others more efficacious.

For these reasons, while we deny that the existing Clerical Subscription is, in the majority of cases, or even in many cases, made otherwise than with good faith and entire sincerity, we desire to record our judgment that the attempts now made to abolish Subscription are fraught with present danger and future evil to the Church, and as such are to be deprecated and opposed.

THE EXPLANATION.

16th June, 1863.

MY DEAR SIR,

It has been agreed by some of the London Incumbents to ask the signatures of all the Clergy of the Diocese to the accompanying Address.

We have been requested to forward it to you; and should you approve of it, you will perhaps be good enough to return it to us, to the care of MESSRS. BELL AND DALDY, Booksellers, 186, Fleet Street, not later than 26th June.

In order to obviate any possible misconception as to the purpose of the Address, we would ask to be allowed to observe—

First.—That the Address expresses no opinion as to the absolute perfection or finality of Clerical Subscription as now enforced; nor is it intended to commit those who sign

it to any declaration that they are not prepared to accept any future revision of the existing mode of Subscription if undertaken by the Church itself.

Secondly.—That what the Address does protest against is, the suggestion that all Subscription should be abolished by an Act of Parliament. This is the substance of the first paragraph.

Thirdly.—That the Address claims positively, in the second paragraph, that the Church must have *some* doctrinal standards by reason of her duties, first, to her Divine Head ; and next, to the lay people whom she is commissioned to teach.

Fourthly.—That the Church of England, both as part of the Church Catholic, and as a reformed Church, and as a Church surrounded by divisions, is now, less than ever, so situated as to be able to dispense with doctrinal safeguards ; and that those which she at present possesses are not in these difficult times likely to be exchanged for any better. This is the substance of the third paragraph.

Fifthly.—The fourth and last paragraph is intended only to vindicate the honesty of those who have accepted and accept the existing mode of Subscription.

